

**The US-ROK Relationship**  
**Prepared Statement of**  
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**Before the**  
**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations**  
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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for providing this opportunity to talk about our Alliance relationship with the Republic of Korea (ROK). The opportunity to discuss this important topic with this Committee comes at a key juncture in our half-century old partnership, a partnership that remains important to both countries' national interests.

Evolving the Alliance

For several years now the United States and Republic of Korea have been engaged in a process to evolve the Alliance to meet the demands of the future security environment. Beginning in 2002 with the Future of the Alliance (FOTA) Talks, the Department of Defense and ROK Ministry of National Defense, along with our partners from the Department of State and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, have conducted an ongoing dialogue that has led to agreements on the realignment of U.S. forces in Korea, the transfer of conventional defense missions from U.S. to ROK forces, and the enhancement of our combined defense and deterrence capabilities.

These agreements have now entered the implementation phase. The ROK has committed significant resources to acquiring land for the relocation of Yongsan Garrison and the Second Infantry Division (2ID). This has not been easy politically, and the efforts of the Ministry of National Defense and the ROK government deserve recognition. While we are approximately one year behind our original, but admittedly ambitious, schedule, we continue to work with the ROK and expect to complete the realignment of U.S. forces by 2009. When this relocation and facility consolidation is complete, our forces will be in a much better position to support the ROK defense and U.S. national interests and our service members and their families will enjoy a greatly increased quality of life. This process is also allowing us to return vacated facilities and land to the Republic of Korea government. When we negotiated the Yongsan Relocation Plan and the 2ID redployment in 2003-2004, we dramatically accelerated this camp return process. When completed in 2009, we will have returned 59 facilities to the Republic of Korea control, much of this high value property. To date we have returned 19 facilities.

At the same time, the ROK agreed to take on new mission areas, missions that have traditionally been carried out by U.S. forces. The transfer of these missions has unencumbered the 2ID forces, greatly increasing their flexibility and facilitating their relocation from the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and bases north of Seoul to a consolidated base south of Seoul. The ROK is meeting its commitments under this agreement, and the transfers are on schedule.

During the FOTA talks, both nations committed to increasing our combined capabilities. With the help of Congress, U.S. forces in Korea and in the region have greatly increased their capabilities since 2003. The \$11 billion investment by the Department of Defense in the past

three years provides U.S. forces in Korea and the region increased agility and lethality. During this same period, the Republic of Korea developed its Defense Reform Plan, a complementary program, and invested over \$10 billion in capabilities modernization. These investments have resulted in the highest level of combined deterrence and defense posture in the history of the Alliance.

While the dialogue began with the need to address “legacy” issues, it has focused primarily on the future and has brought the Alliance to a point where we can seize opportunities to set a new vision for the U.S.-ROK partnership.

### A Changing ROK

Korea itself has been changing significantly, bringing new pressures to bear on the U.S. - ROK relationship and on the military Alliance. A younger generation of Koreans seeks a different relationship with the United States, a relationship that is perceived to be more equal. Alliance issues have become more of a political concern than in previous years. This is not to say that this generation is anti-American or calling for an end to the alliance, but it is not bound by memories of the war and of American sacrifices and is therefore much more assertive of its desires and its concerns than perhaps previous generations have been.

With continued development as a free, democratic and prosperous nation, our Korean partners have, quite understandably, set new goals for themselves. In recent years, the Roh Moo-hyun government has increasingly expressed its desire to take the lead role in its conventional defense, and in particular, to exercise operational control (OPCON) of its own forces in a contingency. ROK forces have developed into a world class military power and South Korea's economic capability and national infrastructure empower the country to bring civilian production capacities to bear in a military conflict, something its neighbor to the North cannot do effectively. Naturally, ROK predominance in its conventional defense is the reasonable next phase in the maturation of the U.S.-ROK relationship and the United States fully supports this change. Indeed, the two sides have been discussing such a step for nearly two decades.

This is an important point that I would like to emphasize. The discussion of a change in our Alliance military structure and command relationships—OPCON—is not new. We have seen this as the natural next step in the evolution of the Alliance for some time. It is unfortunate that some in the ROK government have chosen to define the issue as one of sovereignty versus Alliance, with an emphasis on division. Change of this nature is difficult and there are other voices in South Korea expressing concerns that this transition might signal US abandonment. The fact remains, however, that this is a natural evolution, one whose time has come both militarily and politically. Transitioning the Alliance to a new military and command structure now will establish a relationship that better serves both nations’ interests and is sustainable for the long-term.

### A Changing Structure

We have committed to achieving the goal of a ROK-led defense structure. Doing so requires a reshaping of the U.S.-ROK military partnership in a manner that will strengthen the critical U.S.-ROK relationship while facilitating the Koreans’ predominant role in their own conventional defense.

This will require that we transition our relationship from a system of shared operational control under a combined headquarters to a system of independent, parallel national commands

where the U.S. plays a supporting role to the ROK lead. In basic terms, this means the disestablishment of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC). While CFC's replacement has not yet been fully decided, the evolved system will be one of a continued combined defense and mutual support that is fully capable of defending the Republic of Korea.

Let me be clear on one point here— while United States forces will support the ROK commander, U.S. forces will remain under the command and operational control of an American commander. No other option has been discussed.

We are confident that the adjusted overall U.S. security posture in the Asia Pacific region, coupled with the improvements in ROK capabilities as well as significant and continuing U.S. capabilities on the peninsula, will permit this transition to occur at low risk with no degradation of deterrence and with minimal adjustments in the overall U.S.-ROK bilateral relationship.

#### An Enduring U.S. Presence

The U.S.-ROK Alliance, and the U.S. military presence in Korea, remains a critical element of the security architecture of Northeast Asia. The maintenance of that relationship and the U.S. presence are of strategic importance to the United States. We plan to remain in Korea as long as we are welcomed by the Korean people.

As we transition to a new structure, the United States will continue to provide U.S.-unique capabilities. These “life-of-the-Alliance capabilities” (e.g., sustained air campaign execution and intelligence) are central to the U.S. support for the ROK's defense. Current DoD planning calls for maintaining the existing ground combat brigade, Army combat support elements, and air combat power.

Additionally, the U.S. has committed to continue providing specific U.S. capabilities embedded in the current CFC structure to the ROK joint operational commander for an extended period beyond the transition. A prime example of these “bridging capabilities” is continuing the current U.S.-provided CFC command and control system support as part of the new military construct. These continuing U.S. capabilities clearly demonstrate the U.S. long-term commitment to ROK security.

A key point here is that we are focused on maintaining the proper capabilities on the peninsula. Our assessment is that the ROK forces are capable of defending the Republic of Korea, but that U.S. support in key areas, such as airpower, is a critical enabler to that defense. The United States is committed to maintaining the proper capabilities for supporting the ROK defense, and for conveying clearly to the North the strength and credibility of the alliance's deterrent.

The focus must remain on capabilities, however, not numbers. The U.S. presence will continue to adjust itself, and overall troop numbers may decline slightly once the new command relationships are established and U.S. requirements to support ROK defense are clarified. Such adjustments will likely be small and will be made with a view to maintaining the proper deterrent and defense capabilities on the peninsula to complement the very capable ROK force. The makeup of this presence will evolve over several years as we transition to new command relationships and new plans to support the ROK's defense.

## A Question of When

Much attention has been focused on the question of when this transition should occur. The President has stated that he will not discuss specific dates for the transition and will leave this to be worked out between the two governments at the appropriate level. General Bell, the Commander of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command, United Nations Command, and United States Forces Korea assesses that we can accomplish this transition within the next three years with low risk, as long as we execute an appropriate training and exercise plan, while establishing necessary coordination centers and providing access to important command and control and intelligence capabilities. We are in the process of working with our partner to develop such a training regimen and the necessary coordination structures.

Raised expectations among the ROK public and in the region must be addressed. We will soon agree on what the replacement for the current military structure will be. With the decision to disestablish CFC, both partners will naturally begin investing in the new structure. For CFC – our legacy warfighting mechanism – this will mean dwindling resources, in terms of money and personnel. Lengthening the transition or implementation period beyond three years only increases risk and degrades deterrence. Conversely, demonstrating our Allied ability to transition the command relationship arrangement on an expedited schedule will send a signal of strength regarding the Alliance.

While 2009 may appear ambitious, it is readily achievable. The Commander of CFC, working with the ROK Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, will establish an Implementation Working Group that will report directly to the two of them and manage the implementation process. This group, for example, would implement a theater exercise cycle to allow a validation of ROK capabilities before 2009. The key elements that make a 2009 transition possible are the enduring U.S. support presence and our provision of “bridging” capabilities.

As we make these changes to strengthen the Alliance, we must have strengthened burdensharing support from our ROK partner and the continued provision of appropriate training facilities. These two elements are critical to ensure readiness for the warfight. These two issues are now very much in front of us. In order to avoid degradation of our capabilities and consequent impairment of the Alliance, we need near term resolution of these two issues. One observation to be taken from this is that this is an Alliance with many moving components requiring constant attention and fine tuning. I assure you that we are giving this bonded-in-blood Alliance our full attention

## Conclusion

The U.S. and ROK have stood side by side on “Freedom’s Frontier” for more than 50 years. We have shed blood together in freedom’s cause, both on and off the peninsula. This relationship, forged on the battlefield and sustained through the years by the efforts of Korean and American soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, can and should continue. But it must change to meet the current realities of a prosperous, democratic and independent Republic of Korea. Both sides are committed to instituting this next phase of our Alliance history in a way that ensures our future generations will still enjoy the unique friendship that is the U.S.-ROK Alliance.

We know that the support of our Congress and of the American people is essential to achieving that objective. I welcome your questions.